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Nats' powers for good include protecting the village from
demon attacks but does not extend to modern warfare. When the
Japanese armies were slicing up through Tenasserim in 1941, the elders
of Maung Maung Thyn's village prayed for nat protection against the
invaders. The nats replied "Dear Villagers-we ourselves are wearing
raised longis in this crisis (ready to run)." This is a Rangoon
town joke told among the sophisticated collagates at the University.
Not so well defined, but still sensed is a growing distrust of the
powers of nats to combat modern wils.

The nats can best be visualized as supernatural despots each
with his province (the home, village, sea, babies) and each exacting
tribute of periodic or constant attention in the form of flowers or
food, red and white cloth strips, and an altar which may have the
image of the nat carved in wood (or moulded in modern plasticene).
Banyan trees with their multiple, snake-like trunks, are the most
common places of abode. When disaster in the form of sickness or
other ill fortune strikes, the nats are appeased with offerings
immediately. The SAY SAYA will frequently check with the family of
his patient to make sure this has been done. In Rangoon and else-
where, business men whose fortunes have been good are the main sup-
porters of the nat festivals which are given for the entertainment
of all the nats once a year in October, for a seven day period. NAT
KIDAW (nat-wives) are the mediums who contact the nats by becoming
possessed by them at this festival and other special occasions (for
a single nat) throughout the year. These are married women or more
rarely homosexuals who dance, answer questions and give opinions when
possessed.

Punishment for offense against the nats is first shown by
accidents or sudden illnesses like paralysis meted out to the offender.
If the offender continues the village as a whole will gradually be
afflicted. For example, when a drunkard offends the nats with
blasphemous language evil falls on the entire village. Villagers led
by the elders and a prominent NAT-KIDAW go in a body to the major
banyan tree shrine to have an understanding with the offended nats.
Offerings are given and attention of the nats called to the woes of

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of the villagers. The head-nat, the guardian of the village, replies with accusations that "the whole village has forgotten me", boasts of his powers to punish and is finally mollified. In Rangoon there are professional nat-givers who parade the streets with a cart bearing the image of "the conqueror of the salty waters" (special nat of entrepreneurs). For a few annas he will make offerings to the nat and relieve the busy townspeople of this task.

The arrangement is a mutual one where the people enjoy freedom from oppressions in return for certain concessions. This phenomenon closely parallels the traditional relationship between the rulers and the ruled in Burma. In a real sense the nat concept serves the function of allowing the Burmese a sense of control over catastrophic forces which do not fall into any other system (as secular, political, personal relationships, cosmology.). It is this system of controls that the western scientific system most immediately competes with. The administrative and entrepreneur class of Burmese especially in Rangoon say they "Do not believe" in nats. But it is usual for most individuals, no matter what their western background to apply to nats in cases of ill fortune "just in case".

THAYEH (Ghosts) generally are a group of supernatural spirits closely related to nats in their origins but with a different set of properties. These are "recently" deceased individuals whose crimes and sins while on earth or manner of death condemn them to an eternity of wandering and mischief-making. Actually, each person becomes a ghost at death but is ordinarily released from earth at the moment of the interment of the corpse for judgement in heaven. Those who die of "raw death" become ghosts. These include: death in childbirth, by wild animals (especially tigers), instant deaths by dahn as in warfare, or by hanging. In Maung Maung Than's village a prominent ghost is U Me Gyi (Mr. Blacky) a very sinful fellow who lived 50 or 60 years ago in the village. His complexion is quite black and horribly distorted. He inhabits a banyan tree and specializes in causing infant illness. Offerings of rice at the tree pacifies him. Ghosts are forces for evil only - evil of the more irritating and less important kind. Older people wear red and white coloured strings about their necks as a protection against ghost evils. It is very common to wear a LET-PNET